TRANSCRIPT—Fairview Oral History Project

Interviewee: Mary Lou Whitaker

Interviewers: Tealey Ellis and Judith Robertson

Interview Date: October 18, 2018

Location: Fairview, N.C.

Length: 00:44:08

Tealey Ellis: My name is Tealey Ellis and I'm a volunteer with the Fairview, North Carolina Library Oral History Project. The information from this interview will be placed in the North Carolina Room at Pack Library in downtown Asheville, North Carolina. Today I'm interviewing Mary Lou Whitaker at her home in Fairview, North Carolina. Thank you, Miss Whitaker, for sitting for this interview.

Judith Robertson: This is Judith Robertson recording the oral history of Mary Lou Whitaker at her home, 29 Whit Lane in Fairview, at 10:45 a.m. October 18, 2108 for the Fairview Oral History Project for the North Carolina Room at Pack Library in the Buncombe County Library system. The conditions of use form for sound and video recordings has been signed by the interviewee.

TE: Miss Whitaker, you indicated on your life history form that you were born in Buncombe County but not in Fairview. Where in Buncombe County were you born?

Mary Lou Whitaker: I was born in Haw Creek.

TE: And then when did you come to Fairview?

MW: Nineteen sixty-one, I think.

TE: What were your parents' names and where were they born?

MW: My mother's name was Hazel Lindsay and my father's name was Rufus Bates, and they were born in Buncombe County.

TE: Grandparents' names?

MW: Bessie Lindsay and Will Lindsay is the only ones I know. Debbie Bates and Rufus Henry Bates, Sr.

TE: Did they live in the Haw Creek area as well?

MW: My grandmother Lindsay did, and Miss Bates lived in Hendersonville.

TE: What kind of work did your parents do?

MW: Farming.

TE: Any major crop in particular, or just a variety of crops?

MW: Just a variety.

TE: Did they have livestock as well? You know, cows and—.

MW: They did.

TE: Did you ever do any farming? Did you help?

MW: In the garden.

TE: What did you do in the garden?

MW: Just hoe, pull weeds, whatever.

TE: Was there a canning process going on in the summer?

MW: My grandmother did, yeah.

TE: Did you ever do any of that?

MW: I did after I got married, a lot of it.

TE: What kind of things did you can?

MW: Green beans, corn, just a little bit of everything. Jelly—blackberry and strawberry.

TE: Sounds good. Have a biscuit and we'd be all set. When you came to Fairview to live, was it that you chose it or that's where your husband was from?

MW: That's where my husband was from.

TE: How did you meet him?

MW: We moved to Asheville, and I met him through his mother.

TE: Was it love at first sight?

MW: Sort of, I guess.

TE: And when you were married and living here in Fairview, was this house we're in today, is that where you lived first?

MW: No ma'am. We lived on Edwards Road first, at Broades Trantham's home.

TE: I've only lived here four years, roughly where is Edwards Road?

MW: Do you know where the barbecue place is?

TE: The new barbecue place?

MW: Yes. Going on towards Asheville, it's on the left.

TE: How long did you live in that location?

MW: Until we moved here in '74.

TE: And then you moved into this house here?

MW: We built it.

[Lisa Whitaker enters the room.]

JR: This is your daughter-in-law, Lisa?

[Introductions to Lisa.]

TE: Do you happen to have any photographs of when you were building the house?

MW: Maybe one or two, but goodness, I don't know where they're at.

TE: We're always interested in photographs that might show people building their homes, or what the area looked like where they were building the homes. At any time that you run across any kind of pictures from when you moved here, we'd be more than happy to have those scanned for you and they can become part of oral history project as well. All you'd have to do is just contact either me or the library, tell them who you are and what you have and that you'd like—. And if you don't feel like taking it down there, just get hold of me and I'll come pick them up. Either one of us could do that for you.

MW: I have some of when we—the household shower they gave us.

TE: Anything that's part of this history and your history in living here are things that we're interested in. Just keep that in mind and we'll be happy to help you with that. You mentioned that your family farmed and that you and your husband did some farming as well, when you needed supplies of various kinds, where did you go to buy those things that you needed for farming?

MW: My grandpa, I guess, went to Miller's Store in Haw Creek. And we just went and picked up whatever we was going to plant here.

TE: Was Miller's Store like a general store?

MW: Yes, it was. It was a big part of Haw Creek.

JR: I know Miller's Store. A hardware store on one side and agricultural supplies on the other side of the strip. Great place.

MW: It's a restaurant now, ain't it? We used to walk from Cisco Road all the way to the store for candy.

JR: From Cisco Road? You lived on Cisco?

MW: I lived at the top of the mountain.

TE: How long would that have been, a walk?

JR: Several miles.

TE: What kind of candy did you buy, because it better be worth it.

MW: Just any candy because for a nickel you could buy quite a bit back then.

JR: Did you have school bus service up there?

MW: Halfway up the mountain. Not all the way up where we were. We had to walk down there.

TE: You mentioned not only yours and your husband's farming, but your parents and grandparents farming as well.

MW: Well now, my husband and me, we didn't farm. We just had a garden.

JR: Was the farm for profit or was it just subsistence?

MW: My grandparents, they sold stuff.

TE: And that leads me to where I wanted to ask you about them, even though it was not Fairview, it's still local enough that it gives a general idea of what could be going on here as well. Did your grandparents ever hire other individuals to work on their farm?

MW: No. It was all family.

TE: As a younger person then, during your grandparents' days of farming, what are your memories of their farm?

MW: I just remember all the canning stuff that my grandmother did and my grandpa would work out in the woods and the fields in the wintertime and I remember that ice would freeze in his handlebar mustache. I remember that.

TE: It would be nice if we had a picture of that, for sure.

MW: And I've got a picture of him, but I don't have that, not when it was—.

LW: I'll help you go through your pictures. I'd love to do that.

MW: She's my knight in shining armor.

LW: Believe me, I am blessed with a wonderful mother-in-law.

TE: So you and your husband moved to Fairview and built a house, how would you describe some of your best memories or aspects of living in Fairview, not just then, but maybe starting then and moving up to now?

MW: When we lived out in the old house, out on Edwards Road, I had the oldest one, and the other three was born there and we lived there for a while and the kids played, you know, and they enjoyed it. Mr. Trantham, he farmed too, and he taught the kids to ride the tractor and all that stuff.

TE: Your children were born at home?

MW: No.

TE: They were born in town at Mission?

MW: At St. Joseph's.

TE: All four children?

LW: That's where I was born, too. St. Josephs. I guess they had stopped that many years ago.

TE: If there were any negative aspects of living in Fairview, what were they?

MW: Just going across the mountain in the snow, when it was bad.

TE: That would've certainly been before the transformation from two-lane to four and five.

MW: Yes, ma'am. I got my first ticket when they were building that road. My first and last.

TE: Tell us about that.

MW: I was going towards town and he was coming up and he said I was speeding but I think he got me mixed up with somebody else because—. And my car was sort of a sports car too back then, and so, I think he just thought he had one of the school kids because it was about that time. I think I was sixty when I got it, the first one.

TE: How much was the fine?

MW: I paid seventy-five. It was a hundred and something but he said that was fine.

TE: Tell us your description and memory of when the highway was widened.

MW: Well, I don't remember a lot about it. It was two lanes out forever, from the time we moved here—when did they build that? Well, I was sixty when I got my ticket so they's a building it then. And so, it's really better, but we didn't much like it at first, you know, because it took a lot of people's property out through here.

TE: How do you feel driving on it now? Do you feel safe?

MW: Yes.

TE: And so you don't have to wait as long for the most part.

MW: No.

TE: How do you think your particular neighborhood right here in Fairview itself, what we'll call Fairview downtown, has changed over time?

MW: When we first moved here, there wasn't but, what, three or four houses up through here. And now, I don't know how many is here. And a lot of companies and stuff's built out through here. And it's just growed up.

TE: I would assume that in those early days of having built this house, you said there were only three or four houses, that you knew everybody. Do you know everybody now?

MW: No. I do over there on that road but that's all. And coming up the hill.

TE: With new people moving in, other than not knowing who they are, could you describe any other change in your neighborhood?

MW: No, just the paved road up through here. That's about it. And more houses.

TE: What about shopping, when you and your husband built this house in Fairview, what was shopping like in Fairview? What were your choices?

MW: There wasn't any, really. The Little Log Cabin Restaurant, they called it back then, was down here, as far as food.

LW: It wasn't Angelo's at first. What was it called?

MW: No, it was The Log Cabin, I think that's what it was called.

LW: It was a little diner and then they added on to it.

MW: That was about the only food place here.

TE: Any stores, were there any stores around that you recall that would have been similar to the one in Haw Creek when you went there as a child?

MW: Yes, the one on Old Fort Road, but I forgot what it was called. It was up on Charlotte Highway, but as you turn up Old Fort Road, it was there on the left, going out. And we had Tickles. That was his name, the man that owned it.

LW: It's Dickie's now, right? Right here at the light, of Cane Creek. It was Tickles and apparently, they had everything. Like agricultural stuff and groceries, small amount of groceries that you could buy.

TE: I'm not sure when Food Lion came to town because I'm still new here, when would that have happened? Was it here when you built your house?

MW: No. We went to the A & P store in Haw Creek. It was down on the road where Walmart is now, back over in there.

TE: Where did you go when you needed to buy clothes for your children or yourself or other household items?

MW: We had to go to town, to—.

TE: What kind of stores, though? Where did you go?

MW: Well, we had a Sky City and we had a Peebles store, and we had Rose's and Belk's, we went to. I used to go with my aunt every Saturday. She would get a cab and go to town and she'd take me with her. She'd shop all over town.

JR: This is when you were a child?

MW: When I was little, yes.

JR: You'd go with your aunt and you'd go to all the stores.

TE: What kind of treat did you get when you went with your aunt to town?

MW: We got to go to Kress's and we could buy a toy and we got a hotdog and we really thought that was something back then.

TE: Was it soda fountain style?

MW: Yeah.

JR: They still have that. You can still get a fried bologna sandwich there.

TE: We're still talking about your neighborhood here and Fairview at the same time, downtown Fairview, did you feel safe when there were just a few houses up here?

MW: Yes.

TE: Did you lock your doors?

MW: No. Slept with a screen door up. That door open, in the summertime.

TE: What about safety factors now for your neighborhood?

MW: Well, I feel safe. I still don't lock my doors. I do at night, the kids are in and out so much. But the bears.

TE: Why do you think you still feel safe even though there's a lot of new people in the neighborhood?

MW: I guess I just trust people. I don't know.

TE: What about Fairview itself, in your early days here, were there any crimes or activity going on that was unpleasant?

MW: Well, back then see, you didn't know what was going on. I'm sure there were, a lot of drinking and stuff I know went on, but we just didn't have the stuff we have now to tell us all this stuff.

TE: Was there a newspaper?

MW: Yeah, but I didn't get the newspaper.

TE: What was the newspaper?

MW: The Asheville—.

TE: With all the new neighbors moving in to Fairview, not just in your neighborhood but generally, how would you describe the differences in racial and ethnic backgrounds of people?

MW: I don't think there's a lot of difference. I mean, do you? I don't think people pay it much attention. She teaches school so she knows more about race and stuff than I do. I worked down here for fifty years and so we never had a problem.

TE: Were there other ethnic groups that you worked with?

MW: Oh yes, all kinds.

LW: She definitely worked with lots of different people.

JR: Where did you work?

MW: TE Connectivity, used to be CP Clare, right down here. Tyco now.

LW: She retired in January, fifty years.

JR: And that was just recently?

MW: In January. Here's a picture, the only one I have.

TE: See that's the kind of picture that needs to be scanned.

MW: I don't remember the date or anything on that though, but you're welcome to use it or whatever.

TE: If it's okay with you, when we leave today we'll take that and I probably won't be able to get it back to you today. Might be two or three days. They scan more on Saturdays than other times. I'll definitely be responsible for it. Thank you so much.

MW: I don't know that other one is, they put one in the paper but I don't think that's like it.

TE: This is so—it's expansive, when you see how many people are working there and what it was like.

MW: I guess that's when it was CP Clare. It's changed names so many times.

TE: Do you know roughly the year? I'm looking at hairstyles.

MW: Well, I still have the same one if you'll look.

LW: Would you say that was in the sixties?

MW: It was in the sixties, because I went to work in sixty-five and I quit three years when Lisa was born.

TE: I was going to say sixties because I'm seeing some pouf going on in the hair. Thank you so much, Miss Whitaker. Describe, if you will please, your sense of community here, all of Fairview, and earlier days here as compared to now?

MW: Well, I guess you knew more people back then, than you do now. That's about the only thing. And there's more businesses where you can go meet people than there were back then.

TE: I want to ask you also, what made it possible, in your opinion, for people in earlier days to know everybody and feel comfortable as opposed to now. The sense of community seems to still be present, but what makes it different that you could know people more then. And by you, I don't mean you specifically, but generally. Because this is something we're hearing frequently in the interviews.

MW: Well, back then I think people had more time to visit and to learn who people were and to go places, you know, but now they're so busy, you don't even know the neighbors here. Just when you see them outside.

TE: What about, and this would go back to your early time here with you and your husband and through time, about what might be described as a local character? Someone who could always make people laugh, or tell stories. Do you remember anyone like that, and who it might have been?

MW: No, you went to David Tickles' for all the information. Now they go to the filling stations for coffee.

LW: My husband goes every morning and there's lots of older men and it reminds me of back in the Mayberry days, or in the old barber shop where they all just sit around and talk. But my husband loves to go down there and shoot the bull with the older men. Right here, right below—. KD's or Citgo. Right below Fairview Elementary. The Subway end, but it's a little set of tables there. They drink coffee and catch up.

TE: At Tickles' then, there certainly wasn't a coffee bar then, but it was just a place where they stood around and talked? Was there a place to sit?

MW: You seen everybody, when you stopped in to get something, there was always somebody in there that you knew to talk to. This little store out here, as you go up turning on Old Fort Road, that was a good place too. She talked—.

LW: It's where the rock place is right now. I wish I could remember the name of that.

TE: I know where the rock place is that you're talking about.

JR: We've heard several references to that store. Wright's.

LW: Wright. Correct. Yes.

TE: Almost every community has stories about a legend that it could've been a ghost story, it could've been someone who did a tremendous feat of some kind, but they

became a legend and were known throughout the area. Do you recall anyone like that, that could've been an act of bravery or—?

MW: Well, Mr. Clarke, he was a North Carolina representative.

LW: Jamie Clarke?

MW: And he went to Washington, but he stayed just like he always, he wasn't fancy or anything. And his children today, they're the same way. Have you met them?

TE: I did, yes. When Mr. Clarke was back in town, if you were ever out and about, are you saying he would stop and talk to you?

MW: Yeah, he would talk to you. He knew everybody.

TE: Anyone else you can think of?

MW: No.

LW: I've lived out here thirty-something years, but she's definitely lived out here longer.

TE: What about churches in Fairview then and now as to gathering places?What kind of activities went on besides the usual services?

MW: Well, you didn't have places to eat, you had to go somebody else's, when you had a gathering. You went to somebody's home back then. But now they have their buildings, their community building, whatever you call it. And the Preacher usually come on Sundays and had lunch with somebody, they never did have to go back home and eat.

TE: Is that still true today?

MW: No.

TE: What kind of celebrations today go on in the churches?

MW: Not many of any kind except just Christmas and the holidays. That's about all. They never did have parties or anything like they do now.

TE: You were not a teenager when you moved here but you have children that grew up here. Were there activities for teens? Did the churches do anything like that, and if so, what were they?

MW: Well, some of them do now but they do basketball, kids would go play basketball at different places. Back then they just usually went back down to the school of an evening and played ball.

TE: Was there any place in Fairview to go get your hair done?

MW: Yeah, right down here.

TE: What was it called?

MW: Was it Cathy's? I don't even remember what it was.

TE: Was that the only place for women?

MW: Yeah, that I know of.

TE: What about Barber Shops?

MW: I don't think there was one out here then. There's one out on Charlotte Highway now. You used to have to go to town.

TE: What about doctors? When you were raising your children, were there doctors here in Fairview?

MW: No. Well, Dr. Hamilton, he moved right down here in this white house, as you go down the road. Right up from the library. He lived there and he practiced medicine there after he come from England, I think it was.

JR: Dr. Will Hamilton. He married one of the Clarkes. Susie.

MW: He practiced there and we went down there. That's where my husband found out he had cancer.

TE: So you went to his house. I don't want to be nosey nosey, but what kind of fees would he have charged? If you went in just for, 'I think I have a cold, can you do anything?' What kind of fee?

MW: Well, they did insurance too. My daughter, I took her one time and she didn't like shots, Lisa. And she was real sick and she wouldn't let him give her a shot and I said, 'Well she's probably pulled her panties off,' She was just a little thing then. She hated him. And he says, 'Well, I've got some on but they're full of holes so it don't matter.'

TE: What is your memory of what Fairview Elementary School was like, when your children went there?

MW: Well it was good, but it wasn't crowded like it is now. But it was a good school. They liked it.

TE: What did they like about it?

MW: Well, they liked the teachers pretty good. I never had no problem with the teachers or anything. And they liked to play ball, all of them played ball. They liked that.

TE: Were there any spankings going on at Fairview Elementary that you are aware of?

MW: Yeah, I'm sure there was. My grandson, bless his heart, he's passed away, but he would get in the car, I'd have picked him up of an evening, he'd get in the car and they had pushpins back then and I'd say, 'Joe, how many pushpins did you get instead of how many A's did you get?'

TE: But overall, you had as a mother and as a parent with children in that school, you would say it was a good school?

MW: Yes, it was a good school. Her husband, Tim, when Lisa was born, he didn't get his homework and he said that his mama was having a baby so he didn't have his homework.

LW: I do have a funny story to add to that, that my husband, her son, Tim, has told before. He was real good friends, he grew up with John Rice, another boy his age. And when they were little, like, I don't know, third or fourth grade, Mary Lou, you might can help me on this. But one day at school, Tim said John didn't have his homework or something like that, and the teacher was going to get after him. He climbed out the window and ran home, which was just a road over from Taylor Road, and his mom brought him back to school. But to know, nowadays, the safety issue of kids climbing out the windows, but back then in the old buildings, you know, and it's ground level. But he just decided to crawl out and my husband tells that story. They were just little.

TE: That would be a little embarrassing to be brought back by Mom. How long have you taught?

LW: I taught thirty years. I taught ten years at Oakley and then I transferred when we were married and we moved, after we built down the road here, I transferred to Fairview and taught twenty years. And I've been retired for two years, and then I sub. I sub some.

TE: I think we might add that Lisa Whitaker, Mary Lou's daughter-in-law is involved in this interview today as well, so our transcribers have a name. Would you mind telling us about your twenty years at Fairview Elementary?

LW: Well, I can remember that when they were building the new school, the old school was still standing and they were building the new school right behind. In fact, the parking lot now at the school, in front of the school, is where the old building stood. And I can remember our daughter, she's now twenty-nine, but when she was just a year or two old, we would walk and we walked and pushed the little stroller down to where they were building the new school, and I can remember us walking around the back part of the building and I was thinking, 'Who knows? Maybe someday I may teach here.' Because I was teaching at Oakley. But that, even though I did not attend Fairview Elementary, I remember Fairview Elementary because I went to Biltmore Elementary and then my family moved on into Oakley and then I went to Reynold Middle School and Reynolds High School. And just another little note, I can remember in high school, the four feeder schools—Fairview, Oakley, Bell, and Haw Creek. Fairview was known in the schools in my age, that it was the farm country. It was the rural country. It was the farm.

JR: We heard 'Far-view.'

LW: Or 'Far-view.' Yes. And I can remember my cousin lived in Fairview and I can remember coming out when I was a little girl, playing with her and I do remember it being so, you know, it's just out in the sticks. Just out. You know, that's what it was considered. But it was very pretty, I always liked coming out here.

MW: It was a two-story building.

LW: And now, it's the opposite. People have moved. There's such a big population, which is fine, but I think it is because truly, I'm partial. I think it is one of the prettiest areas. The mountains, and it's just a very pretty area.

MW: I went to Reynolds too. I graduated at Reynolds and we left during a pep rally one evening, and a girl we played ball with, she broke her foot and we went up on Garren Creek and I thought, 'Lord, I won't never get back to catch that bus to get home. I don't know how I'm going to get home.' Because I thought that was furthest place I had ever been in my life.

TE: What year did you graduate from Reynolds?

MW: Fifty-eight.

TE: Describe your experience there, in fifty-eight at the high school.

MW: It was good. I went to Biltmore in the ninth grade because Haw Creek was so crowded, some of us went to Biltmore and then when they built the new school, the Reynolds school, when I was in the tenth grade, we moved, got transferred over to Reynolds.

LW: Tell her about basketball.

MW: Yeah, I played basketball. We just played from each side. We didn't play the full court like they do now.

TE: What position?

MW: I was a guard.

TE: Do you have any pictures of you on the basketball team?

MW: Yeah, I think I do.

LW: I'll definitely help her locate the pictures. And her granddaughter is the Girls' Basketball Coach at Reynolds. My daughter.

JR: And you played also, I guess.

LW: I did. I played at Reynolds.

JR: Was it intramural when you were playing? Did you play other schools?

MW: Not many. Not like they do now. But, yeah, we did.

TE: Have you seen much change, I think I kind of touched on this a little bit earlier about work, back to the ethnic background and makeup of Fairview now, did you encounter or hear about any community unrest or dislike that maybe the population was changing any, as the sixties and seventies and eighties rolled around?

MW: No. I don't recall anything like that.

TE: Do you think then that Fairview is still a welcoming community for new people that come in?

MW: I do.

TE: What about you, Lisa?

LW: I would agree. If I hear of any, I've not really heard of anything that would be like a major upset or major disruption —but no, I can't think of anything. I think the people that have moved in have pretty much meshed well with the old-timers still here, and the people that are still here, the locals.

TE: What about from your perspective as a teacher at Fairview Elementary, as new students came in from different races and different parts of the county coming in? How were those children greeted with different accents and so forth?

LW: I think definitely welcomed. Welcomed with open arms. As a teacher I had several of those students from different backgrounds so I cannot recall any of, you know, not welcoming or—. That's on my end, but I have not heard anything.

TE: Miss Whitaker, are there any areas or memories that you have that I haven't asked the appropriate question for maybe that you want to share something

maybe that has just come to mind while we're talking today, any topic that we haven't touched on that you want to discuss?

MW: No.

LW: I would like for her to share, because I've heard these stories when I teaching, when we had fundraisers at Fairview. The fundraisers now are definitely different from way back when my husband and her children were younger. Like, the donkey race or the cow patty and what—. Could you just touch on that?

MW: Well, we had donkey ball games and people would ride them for so much and try to stay on them, but they couldn't stay on them.

JR: Did all the farmers donate their donkeys for the day?

MW: I think the Clarkes got most of the donkeys. I'm not sure.

LW: And they would raise money, depending on how long they would stay on the donkey. See I always heard these stories and all the older teachers would just laugh and hoot and holler about it, and I'm like, I never had seen one of those.

MW: They'd throw them off, they couldn't stay on.

TE: Was it so much money per minute or something, as to what the ride cost?

MW: No, you just had to pay to ride. Two or three dollars.

LW: What about cow patties? What was that?

MW: I don't know about cow patties.

LW: I thought there was something about the cow patties.

MW: But now when my kids were playing ball—nowadays they raffle off stuff, but we as parents had to go out and get the money from the different stores and places for

our kids for their uniforms and stuff. And now they buy them. But we had to go ourself and get the money.

TE: I think that's really great. Do you have any questions or topics that we haven't touched on that you want to add? Lisa? Thank you again, Miss Whitaker for sitting for this and again, Judith and I are both glad that you got through your surgery fine and making your recovery and that you're up and moving. Thank you again.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Alice Helms

Date: March 30, 2020